

What OA Brings to Princeton



- **Leadership Skills:** Outdoor Action provides comprehensive leadership development opportunities for hundreds of students each year, providing real-world experience in leading and mentoring peers.
- **Community & Team Building:** OA trips provide an opportunity for interaction across the diversity of the University community, breaking down stereotypes and the many social silos that separate students. The experiences and friendships made through OA serve as bridges across diverse groups and campus populations.
- **Grit and Resilience:** Challenge and uncertainty are integral to small group adventure activities—requiring group cooperation and helping develop resiliency and self-confidence.
- **Transition and Orientation:** The OA Orientation experience has proven to be extremely effective in easing the transition of incoming students to college life.
- **Health & Wellness:** Current research shows that spending time in the outdoors is effective for reducing stress and promoting positive mental health. Outdoor activities are also a healthy and alcohol-free form of social interaction. Outdoor Action provides students with opportunities to spend time in nature and “disconnect” from constant digital communication.
- **Sustainability & Environmental Awareness:** Spending time in the outdoors supports the University’s sustainability goals. According to Shana Weber, Director of the Office of Sustainability, “by exposing hundreds of students to the natural world—through Orientation trips, training trips, and additional programming—OA instills a sense of awe, respect, and understanding of the natural world.”

A Vision for OA’s Future

Outdoor Action’s 50th Anniversary is just five years away. As part of the recognition of all that OA has contributed to the fabric of Princeton over the past forty-five years, we began a process to develop a vision for what Outdoor Action could look like in 2024. That process started with the OA Alumni Advisory Group, a group of alumni who met starting in December 2016 to discuss the future possibilities for OA. The Advisory Group’s work culminated in a proposal to the University to form a Strategic Planning Committee which began its work in December 2018. The Strategic Planning Committee report is nearing completion, and will be submitted to the University in the coming months. I wanted to share with you some of the ideas that have been explored over the past three years.

Outdoor Action Campus Impact

The Strategic Planning committee identified six key elements of Outdoor Action that have significant impacts on the positive growth and development of students at Princeton. Many of these positive impacts are borne out by research both at Princeton and elsewhere.

How You can Help

During my 38 years as Director of Outdoor Action, it has been my greatest joy to watch students grow and develop as leaders and build life-long connections with the outdoors. I know first-hand how transformational OA is for participants; I have seen that impact echoed countless times in the faces of our students. When I speak to alumni, people always ask ‘how is OA doing?’. Inherent in that question is the indelible mark of personal growth that OA has had on that person.



Complete the OA Alumni Survey

If you haven't yet completed the OA Alumni Survey, we encourage you to take five minutes to answer a few questions about how OA has impacted you since you graduated. This is part of the Strategic Planning Committee's ongoing research to demonstrate the value and impact of Outdoor Action.

<https://bit.ly/2OBxZtT>

What the Future Could Bring

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Outdoor Action is, in my opinion, one of the greatest untapped resources at Princeton. No other single program addresses the unique combination of learning experiences that OA does. The Strategic Planning Committee has illuminated a potential future for OA that impacts many more students than we currently do. We can build new program initiatives and opportunities for all Princeton students to benefit, and we can do more for alumni as well. This will take a major effort from all of us and I am counting on your support. As all of you know, the impact of OA extends far beyond the Fitzrandoph Gates!

Rick Curtis '79 h04 h13
Director, Outdoor Action



Big Discussions Generate Big Ideas

Over the past year the Strategic Planning Committee spent time examining three areas of the Outdoor Action:

- The impact that OA has on students and alumni
- How we compare with our peer institutions
- What partnerships could be developed with other offices and programs on campus

Here are the big takeaways from those discussions that create a possible blueprint for the OA's future.

Leadership Development through Experiential Education

As a result of the world-class education they receive, Princeton students will undoubtedly go on to serve in leadership roles in the career paths they choose after Princeton. Preparing students for these leadership roles is a major co-curricular goal for the undergraduate and graduate student experience.

Outdoor Action has always been at the forefront of student leadership development at Princeton through a comprehensive leadership program that goes from on-campus training modules to experiential-field-based

learning and mentoring and placing students in real-world leadership positions.

Currently, these trainings are targeted at those students interested in being OA Leaders, but all Princeton students would benefit from building their leadership skills. Many of these leadership skills can be presented through learning modules that can be delivered through campus-based adventure programming as well as in the outdoors. In the committee's discussions with possible campus partners, there was significant interest around OA offering more leadership skill development programming during the academic year.

OA Pilot Programs for 2019

Here are some of the pilot programs that we are implementing this year:

- **Muslim/Jewish Student Dialogue Program:** a five-day basecamp hiking trip in Utah co-sponsored with the Center for Jewish Life and the Muslim Student Life Program.
- **Leadership for Effective Teams:** a 3-hour leadership development workshop for the first and second year Masters in Public Affairs students from the Woodrow Wilson School.

With increased funding support OA could expand the types of academic year programs we can offer.

Academic Year Programming

From 1975 through 2000, Outdoor Action offered trips and activities throughout the academic year involving thousands of students. These programs were discontinued in 2001 because the cost was prohibitive for many students.

Expanding OA programming throughout the academic year would provide all undergraduate and graduate students with opportunities to engage in small-group outdoor recreation experiences as a regular part of their Princeton experience. A number of our peer institutions

do this effectively, and OA has been successful at this in the past. A robust program of day and multi-day activities, along with on-campus activities, would vastly increase OA's impact in the six key campus impact areas.



Students explore nature and build friendships

Addressing the needs and interests of underrepresented groups would need to be a primary goal of any expansion of OA programming. When crafting the portfolio of expanded academic year programs, OA would need to intentionally focus on activities that do not require previous experience with outdoor recreation, such as shorter day trip activities where students can experiment with something new. OA would need to provide the necessary skills instruction, leader support and personal equipment to facilitate ease of entry into outdoor adventure activities for all students.

Over the years, Outdoor Action has developed a number of successful partnerships with other offices and departments on campus by offering leadership development workshops or customized outdoor activities. Building stronger collaboration and partnerships across the University would extend the services that OA offers to the broadest range of students.

Graduate students in particular were identified as an underserved population for co-curricular programming. Expanding opportunities for graduate students in the full range of OA opportunities during the academic year would be a valuable contribution to campus life.

Nature Rx

Student health and wellness is an increasingly important issue for the University. This is both because of the demands of academic life and the rising levels of anxiety and depression in young people. Addressing these mental health needs is a top priority on campus. There is ample research that shows that “spending even a few hours each week in nature can improve mood, cognitive ability, alertness, ability to concentrate, social connection and overall sense of well-being.”¹ Both Cornell and

1 Nature Rx, Donald A. Rakow and Gregory T. Eells, Cornell University Press, 2019

Help us Build a Year-round Program

To achieve these lofty goals we will need to secure funding for OA's future:

- **Build Outdoor Programs & Activities for students throughout the academic year** (\$100,000 needed annually)
- **Create permanent funding to support the OA Climbing Program and the Climbing Wall** (\$40,000 needed annually)

You can help us reach these goals by making a gift to Princeton University for Outdoor Action.

the University of Pennsylvania have introduced “nature prescription” programs to encourage students to spend time outdoors.

Outdoor Action offers the unique combination of trained leaders and experienced professional staff to create opportunities for students to reduce stress through outdoor adventure activities. Through offering outdoor skills classes and trips, OA would help students build the skills they need to make the outdoors a part of their daily life.

We also know from research that experiential education in the outdoors builds grit and resilience, as well as enhances teamwork and leadership skills. These qualities make for a healthier person and a healthier campus.

Environmental Stewardship

Part of the University's newly released Sustainability Action Plan for 2026 and Beyond is to “invite engagement with nature and the outdoors.” Spending time outdoors not only benefits the person, it benefits the environment as well. People who have a strong connection to nature have a stronger commitment to preserving the environment. Addressing climate change is something that all students should be passionate about, and building a connection with nature is an important tool for creating that passion and commitment.



Students develop grit and resilience through adventure

OA Alumni Trip 2020: Hiking the Dolomites



Join Us July 10 - 18, 2020

Princeton Journeys and Outdoor Action are pleased to offer active travelers the chance to be dazzled by the monumental beauty of Italy's Dolomites, with majestic pinnacles, pillars, spires, and rock faces that change color at different points throughout the day. Alongside Outdoor Action Director Rick Curtis '79, hike from north to south - in Austria and Italy - covering all the must-see sites of this magnificent range, including the most famous peaks: Schlern, Sella, Drei Zinnen (Tre Cime de Lavaredo), and Marmolada. Daily challenging hikes take in forests, surreal rock formations, glacial lakes, and high alpine meadows. Enjoy picnic lunches at charming backcountry refuges with stunning backdrops, and unwind back at comfortable hotels enjoying wonderful local food.

This is a rigorous program designed for very experienced hikers. Daily elevation gain and loss varies up to 3,200 feet and at elevations up to 10,334 feet above sea level. Daily hikes typically range from 5-7 hours, typically over 5-8 miles per day. You will be led by highly skilled local mountain guides who will show you the best of the Dolomites, from mountain passes to wineries.

This itinerary combines challenging hikes and scenic drives plus free time to explore charming villages and

towns along the way. The Italian Dolomites is “must do” for every mountain hiker, and we hope you can join this beautiful walk with its clear, clean air, dark pine forests, soaring rocky peaks and of course, your fellow tigers!

Itinerary

- Day-1: Arrive in Innsbruck, Austria
- Day-2: Warm-up hike through Pragser Wildsee
- Day-3: Hike below the face of Drei Zinnen
- Day-4: Explore the trails of Cortina D'ampezzo
- Day-5: Hike the Cinque Torri
- Day-6: Summit Piz Boè
- Day-7: Traverse the mighty Rosengarten Rotwand
- Day-8: Visit “Otzi The Iceman” in Bozen
- Day-9: Depart from Innsbruck, Austria

Learn More & Register at

<https://alumni.princeton.edu/learntravel/journeys/hiking-dolomites-outdoor-action>



Future OA/Princeton Journeys Trips

Stay up to date on future OA alumni adventures or suggest exciting places to go—subscribe at:

<https://outdooraction.princeton.edu/form/alumni-trip-interest>